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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS,
CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

1. Summary: The Taipei dailies concentrated their coverage this past weekend on cross-strait relations, while their focus shifted Monday to report on their front pages that President Chen Shui-bian ordered the DPP caucus in the Legislative Yuan to overturn the "Law on the National Assembly's Exercise of Power" that was passed last Friday. Members of Taiwan's National Assembly are responsible for voting on constitutional amendments.

2. Both the centrist "China Times" and the pro-unification "United Daily News" reported on their front pages Saturday (May 21) that the Taiwan government welcomes China's decision to lift its ban on mainland Chinese making sightseeing trips to Taiwan, but each newspaper emphasized that both sides should negotiate to ensure the policy is acceptable to both governments. The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, however, ran a banner headline on its second page that day that said: "Bian: Taiwan's China fever is declining." The sub-headline added: "[Bian] accepted an interview from The Economist, saying that [China's] suppression of [Taiwan's] WHO bid has waken up those who have illusions about China. [Bian also] criticized that the 'both sides on the Strait, one China' [statement] is a step backward."

3. The "Liberty Times," in the meantime, carried a news story on cross-strait relations on page two with the headline: "President Chen: Bian-Hu meeting must be held at a third country." The sub-headline read: "[Chen] said in private that there should not be any preconditions for the meeting between him and Hu, including the One China and 1992 Consensus. But based on the results of [KMT Chairman] Lien Chan's and [PFP Chairman] James Soong's China trips, chances are slim for Bian and Hu to meet now."

4. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a "Liberty Times" editorial urged Chen to stick to the Taiwan-centered route and not to sacrifice Taiwan's sovereignty just because he wants to take certain measures to seek reconciliation and co-existence. A commentary in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" said Chen is now standing at a crossroads with regard to cross-strait policy. In the centrist "China Times," Professor Chu Yun-han wrote a commentary that described the constitutional reform process in Taiwan as "bizarre." End summary.

1. Cross-Strait Relations

A) "[The Government] Must Not Sacrifice Its Objectives Simply Because It Wants to Adopt Certain Measures to Seek Reconciliation and Co-existence - the Taiwan-Centered Route Must Not Be Changed Again"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 800,000] editorialized (5/23):

". Even though President A-bian did not deliver any speech May 20, the anniversary of his inauguration day, he emphasized Sunday when participating in the annual meeting of the Lion's Club that [he will] uphold Taiwan's national sovereignty, [and] stick to the ideals of democratic reforms and the Taiwan-centered route to seek reconciliation and dialogue. In the next three years, A-bian must thoroughly put all these words into practice, both in the aspect of the interaction between the ruling and opposition parties and with regard to cross-strait relations. Only by that can he realize the promises he made during his campaigns and walk out a new route that upholds Taiwan-centered consciousness, and only by doing so can Taiwan's security and the well-being of Taiwan people be safeguarded."

B) "Chen at a Crossroads over Cross-Strait Policy"

Assistant Professor of Political Science at Soochow

University Emile Sheng noted in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (5/23):

". In setting up his cross-strait policy, Chen has to consider the reactions of Washington, Beijing, opposition parties, independence forces in Taiwan, the DPP's factions and public opinion. It is not easy to find a balance between these various forces, but Chen's vacillating and shortsighted tactics have increased the hostility of opponents and raised doubts among supporters. If he really wants to achieve something in the time remaining, he must pursue a consistent political agenda and prepare himself to deal with the criticism that this may engender. .

"Chen is at crossroads, and none of the options before him - whether to risk war, seek peace or to procrastinate - are easy. But if political infighting deprives him of the ability to choose one of these roads, then many opportunities will simply pass us by. Whether When will succeed in the end will be determined not only by his sincerity, but also by his vision.

"Vision refers not only to a skillful political strategy but also to broad political horizons. Chen must rise above personal or partisan motives and think about setting an example for the rest of the world. For the future of cross-strait relations, Chen should work with opposition parties rather than engaging in political infighting and divisive strategies."

12. Constitutional Reform

A) "Fantastic Story of Taiwan's Constitutional Reforms"

Professor Chu Yun-han of the National Taiwan University's Department of Political Science commented in the centrist, pro-status quo "China Time" [circulation: 600,000] (5/23):

". Two things are very bizarre with regard to the constitutional reform process this time: First, over the past ten years, the Legislative Yuan has been tying its hands and has never exercised its authority to amend [Taiwan's] Constitution. But look at the masterpiece of its first effort in leading constitutional revision: it has passed a constitutional proposal with regard to congressional reforms, which will definitely seriously undermine the Legislative Yuan's role in representing the diversity of our society and undercut its legislative and supervisory functions. Second, many political figures used to regard public participation in constitutional reform as the highest objective for democratic reforms, and as a result, they tried their best to promote the proposal of 'abolishing ad hoc National Assembly representatives' and replaced it with a 'public referendum on constitutional reform.' They also tried to package the referendum as the main course of the set meal of constitutional reform this time and define the ad hoc National Assembly election as a 'substantive' referendum. But in the end, the less than one fourth of the voter turnout rate showed that this constitutional reform lacks justification in a democratic sense and has formed a constitutional wound that is hard to mend. ."

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